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For Ident. only

The Letter addressed
to Foreign Minister YOSHIDA
from SHIRATORI, Toshio

December 10, 1945

Dear Mr. Yoshida:


It was more than sixteen years ago that Baron Shidehara, as Foreign Minister and yourself as vice-minister, were good enough to nominate me as weekly lecturer on foreign affairs before the Emperor. That privileged post which I held for nearly three years afforded me the rare opportunity of observing and studying the personality of our Sovereign at a close range. As a result, I could thoroughly convince myself of his innate love of peace, his thirst for truth, and his genuine anxiety for the welfare of his people. Especially Keen, I found, were his interest in foreign affairs and his desire for good relations with other nations. It seemed to me that he had an instinctive mistrust of the military and that nothing worse became him than his title of Generalissimo and the military uniform in which he had always to appear in public.

When the Manchurian affair occurred his reaction to it was unmistakable. I learned at the time on good authority that, for the first few months, both the War Minister and the Chief of General Staff, were taken sharply to task almost at every turn

whenever they were received in audience by His Majesty for report on matters under their jurisdiction. I myself remember his asking me several times whether such and such decision by the Government had been taken on the initiative of the Foreign Office or of the War Ministry. In short, I felt that he was in every respect true to type as Tenno of Japan. But the current of affairs set in motion by the Manchurian imbroglio rapidly gathered such a momentum that it carried everything before it. No man, however wise or virtuous could have stopped it before it had run its course. It did run its course to a finish and here we are amidst the abyss.

Stupefied by the fearful blow dealt them, the Japanese people are for the moment altogether at a loss what to think or believe. Hitherto, we called this country of ours "the land of Gods" and the Emperor the Son of Heaven and with a light heart, believed in Divine help in case of real need. Kamikaze in their sense, however, did not come after all. They were visited, instead, by earthquakes, typhoons, floods, and famine. What they liked to call a holy war ended in an ignominious defeat and the country, for the first time in its history, is placed under the occupation of foreign armies. In face of these dire facts, the disillusionment of the people is complete. Disappointed and exasperated, they are throwing to the winds what faith they had in Kami-Sama, and their evaluation

this nation's history and of the Tenno system is naturally at its lowest ebb. The state of things prevailing in Japan today reminds one forcibly of that gloomy chapter in Hebrew history where, their country lost and groaning under the Roman yoke, the people eagerly longed for the coming of the prophesied Messiah who would give them back their ancient glory under David and Solomon. It was Jesus of Nazareth, however, who did come, an entirely different sort of Messiah who told them to "render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and unto God that which is God's". That was exactly the contrary of their expectation. So they finally lent themselves to the commission of that irrevocable crime of murdering their Christ on the cross. Similarly, are not the Japanese people of today, having asked of their Deity and of their Tenno what they ought not to have asked and not getting it, so deeply chagrined that they are on the point of giving themselves over to an everlasting nay? While it seems to me that now, if ever, is the time for us all to turn to Heaven in all humbleness of heart and in profound repentance, the actual tendency is quite the reverse. That is the most deplorable phase of the whole situation.

Take an oblong sheet of paper and, folding it twice as when making paper cranes, get it into a shape like this ; cut it along the dotted lines

into five parts of equal width and you will have nine pieces of paper like those enclosed herewith. You will find that they can be put together so as to form the two Chinese characters signifying Japan (日本). Take it to pieces again and arrange the cuttings in another way and you will get a cross (+) and the word hell (HELL).

Please do not imagine, dear Mr. Yoshida, that I am trifling with you, for I am quite serious. I read about this puzzle several years ago in a book entitled "The Three J's Proposition" (Japan, Jesus, and Jews), by the late Mr. Sakai, head of the Japano-Jewish Association. The puzzle is said to have been invented by an English hospital nurse during the first World War. How a foreigner, with perhaps little knowledge of Japan and the Japanese language, could have made it may in itself be considered somewhat of a mystery. At any rate, for us Japanese reduced to the present predicament, it is too grimly suggestive to be lightly dismissed as a mere piece of amusement. Indeed I venture to think that it may not be too much to say that the future of Japan largely depends upon how we solve this puzzle and what we read into it. The palpable implication of the riddle is that, to begin with, the whole make-up of the old Japan (日本) must be taken to pieces and that all chaffs, abuses, sins and impurities must be discarded

and borne away to the shades below (H^{III}), until, after the great purge, that only remains which is symbolized by the cross (+). The process of disintegration has been going on in full swing under our very eyes. Dull would he be of mind who were to fail to discern in all that the unseen hand of the Almighty. No less patent must it be that that same hand shall guide the building up of the new structure. Thus the marrow and essence of the whole problem before us would seem to be the cross. What exactly may that mean? May that imply that Japan is to be Christianized outright? It might or it might not, for religion is admittedly too complex a matter to be settled out of hand one way or the other.

Now the cross is generally supposed to be the symbol exclusively of Christianity. Seeing, however, that Jesus told his disciples on several occasions to "take up their cross", it does not, to my mind, necessarily represent the wooden cross on which Christ was crucified. Rather may it not be presumed that the Hebrew people had always regarded it as symbolic of the Supreme Being, omnipresent through time (vertical) and space (horizontal), which is variously called in various ages and climes? It is said that the two Shrines at Ise which together make one temple (X X +) also represent, by the different ways in which the cross-beams on their respective roofs are cut out, a cross, i.e. time (the Inner Shrine) and

space (the Outer Shrine). It is moreover said that on the back of the Sacred Mirror of the Inner Shrine is to be found a writing in which apparently is the Hebrew alphabet; and, again, that one of the gates to the temple at Jerusalem bears the Crest of Chrysanthemum with sixteen petals. It is perhaps because of these and many other similarities in matters pertaining to the worship of God, besides marked affinities in racial traits, that the Japanese and Jewish peoples are considered to be closely related to each other by some observers both native and foreign. To what extent such a surmise may be verified by strictly scientific researches remains to be seen. Be that as it might, there is in my opinion one aspect in this connection which is of immediate concern to this nation at the present juncture. As it is to the deterioration of their ideas about God and especially their idolatrous tendency that the downfall of the Israelites as a nation is generally attributed, so may it not be said that the root cause of our present debacle is the beclouding and abuse of the true spirit of Shinto on one hand, and on the other, the apathy to matters of worship or its utter materialization on the part of so large a section of the people? Just as Hebraism taught by Moses had become so twisted or reduced to formalism at the hands of later Israelites that God sent down Christ among them "not to destroy but fulfil the law", so for Shintoism of Japan, if it really means the

"Way of God", a thorough-going overhaul is long overdue. And since there cannot be, in the nature of things, two universal Gods nor two ways of one God, and inasmuch as the true attributes of the Supreme Being have nowhere so unmistakably been made manifest as by Jesus who "spake as never man spake", I for one see no reason why the teachings of Christ should not be accepted by us Japanese without any reserve. Quite a few Shintoists freely admit that a genuine and true interpretation of Shintoism would bring it very near Christianity. Now that the diehards are out of the way, the metamorphosis might prove much easier of accomplishment than is commonly imagined.

Although a wide dissemination of Christianity among the people as a religion in its accepted form will not be an easy affair and will in any case take a long time, the history of Buddhism in Japan shows that it would by no means be impossible. The question only is if we can afford to wait such a tedious development or to bear with a sort of repetition of the uninteresting Buddhist history of Japan. In this connection it strikes me, indeed it must occur to every Japanese who ponders on the matter at all seriously, that a key to a quicker solution of the whole question might be found in the Tenno system. Suppose the Emperor were thoroughly to Christianize himself in spirit and, in person, to lead the entire nation in that direction. Would not that result in practically

Christianizing Japan wholesale and at a stroke? A Tenno speaking to his people in the spirit and language of Christ and practicing the Gospel doctrines both in Court and Government would be far more in keeping with the scheme of things in undistorted Shintoism than the figures of some of our former monarchs who wore black robes, read sutras, and prayed for their own rebirth in some paradise afar off.

The people of Japan are now called upon to decide whether or not to continue the Tenno regime in future. Given freedom of expression, the answer in all probability would be in the affirmative. But that would not appear to me to be the whole question nor even the most important part of it. The crux of the matter must rather be; what kind of a Tenno shall we accept anew as our sovereign? Two thousand years ago, the Hebrew people had a similar question put to them. The answer they gave is a matter of history. What shall we do? Shall we accept Christ in the person of the Tenno, so to speak? It would not do to put the matter before the people as a religious issue, although, as far as the general public are concerned, their very indifference to religion might, if anything, facilitate the acceptance of the proposition. Instead thereof, might it not be made so to dawn upon them gradually that, when they are aware, the sun is well up in the sky? We have our Pharisees and scribes, no doubt, but the decision in

our case largely rests with the Emperor himself. If forms and rituals are not insisted upon, if it is mainly a question of spirit and substance, I do not suppose that His Majesty will much hesitate to espouse the Christian doctrine. For many centuries our Emperors were educated in Chinese Classics, the so-called "Imperial Learning" consisting, as I understand, largely in Confucian teachings about the "Kingly Way"; and the Imperial rescripts are to this day so full of classical Chinese expressions and quotations which many of the people do not understand at all. It is almost incomprehensible why, while we imported so freely the fruits of Western Culture and civilization, little or no notice has hitherto been taken of the Christian religion by the Imperial Court. The time is more than ripe for a drastic change in this respect. A beginning might forthwith be made with the education of the Crown Prince.

Democracy is the watchword of the day and naturally all possible efforts must be bent to the democratization of the nation and the government. Democracy, however, is not a question of form or machinery merely; it is one of spirit and of general outlook. Where, for instance, would the American democracy be without its spiritual and idealist background? In spite of the communist tenet denying God and denouncing religion as opium, not only had Soviet Russia to give back

to the people the freedom of worship, but there is said to be on foot a movement for a new religion in that country.

Extremes meet, and I should not be surprised if the atomic age upon which we have just entered were to prove at the same time a religious age par excellence. It would not do, therefore, for the new Japan to be taken up exclusively with political, economic and social reforms alone, important though they undoubtedly are.

In regard also to the question of the revision of the Constitution, attention seems to be concentrated at present on the limitation of the prerogatives of the sovereign and the extension of the rights of the people. That is all very well, but those matters are fully defined in constitutions of other countries upon which we can draw at will. So the problem may after all be comparatively simple. Are we not, however, going to be a "peace at any price" nation? The foundation for eternal peace, as the Imperial rescript of August 15th has it, must surely be laid in the new Constitution. Provisions containing a solemn promise on the part of the Emperor never, under any circumstances, to make his subjects fight a war, the right of the people to refuse military service in any form under any government, and the non-application to martial use of any part of the resources of the country, must form the cornerstone of the fundamental law of the new Japan if it is seriously meant to make her a land of eternal peace. That would be a

totally new departure in constitutional legislation. After the crushing defeat in war, and weltering in a quagmire of misery resulting from a protracted campaign overseas, we are now in such a subdued mood that no one ever dreams of another war in any measurable future. But there be many among us to whom renouncing war of any sort, under any circumstances whatever and for all time to come, might appear quite another thing. Honest misgivings might be entertained for wanton attacks from our continental neighbours, or vain hopes might still lurk in some dishonest bosoms for a fundamental change in international interests and relations. Surely it would require all the courage and determination we can muster to take the fateful decision once and for all. Unless animated by a strong religious faith, we might find the difficulty insurmountable even under the existing circumstances. Here also, or rather in this connection particularly, the Tenno system would prove an invaluable, nay almost indispensable factor in our new governmental structure. Honestly I do not see how, without Tenno, a peace clause could effectively be wrought into the framework of the new Constitution. Only by binding up that clause indissolubly with the provisions concerning the Emperor and by making that chapter of the code unrevisable except through downright revolution, can we secure eternal peace for this nation.

Taking the Prussian constitution as a model, our statesmen of the Meiji Era provided in the present Constitution for the prerogatives of the Tenno to head the army and navy and to declare war, as if it were a matter of course for a sovereign. If they had more deeply studied into the history of Japan, they would have found out that no Emperor since the foundation of the country ever became the Chief of a standing army or navy and that not a single instance of any importance could be cited where the Emperor ordered the nation to engage in a foreign war of any sort. It is a pity indeed that on account of these provisions in the Constitution the sovereign, from Emperor Meiji down, was made apparently responsible for the many wars this nation fought and for the resultant expansion of territory, until the impression came to prevail abroad that the Tenno system, along with

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Shintoism, is the principal source of Japanese militarism and aggression. Nothing is farther from the truth. As is well known, in our Shinto literature especial emphasis is persistently and invariably laid on the Tenno's mission to reign over this land in peace and tranquility. In fact, besides the commandment always to regard the Sacred Mirror as the spirit of his Heavenly Ancestor, this about his peace mission is the outstanding injunction ordained upon the Tenno as the ruler of his people. That is why I believe that for the Tenno to identify himself, before his people, with the "Prince of Peace" as Christ is called, would not only be perfectly natural but be in fulfillment of the commandment of his Ancestor. With a Tenno so conceived, a new Constitution framed in that spirit, and a Christian democratic habit of mind cultivated by the monarch and the people alike, this country will before very long be turned into a veritable land of eternal peace in fact as well as in name.

I am sorry, Mr. Yoshida, to have singled you out for a target of this lengthy epistle. You probably did not expect any such verbosity on my part when you told me to put my ideas in writing. Nevertheless, if you have ~~not given it up midway~~ ^{not given it up midway} and thrown it into the wastepaper basket, will you kindly have a copy made of it and sent round to Premier Shidenara? I am anxious to know what he may say to my suggestion about the new Constitution.

With best wishes and warmest regards, I am,
Yours most faithfully,
/s/ T. Shiratori